

The Griswolds' Model

BY MARGARET BUSBEE SHIPP

Illustrated by R. F. Schabelitz

GRISWOLD flung down the afternoon paper with an exclamation of disgust. His wife's glance was comprehending.

"The Lanneau divorce-case?" she asked. "When family skeletons are as unattractive as theirs, it seems a mistake to rattle them around so noisily."

"Skeletons? Nothing so decent—putrid corpses!" he growled. "Lanneau is a rather good sort, and Lily isn't the worst woman we know. Why couldn't they get a decent divorce? Why do sensible people invariably lose their heads when it comes to a question of suicide or divorce? Yet the tidiest woman will choose the sloppiest, bloodiest way of getting out of the world—fling herself in front of a train, or jump down an elevator-shaft; and a man who has shunned publicity all his life will wind up by blowing out his brains in a big hotel! With the choice of a number of dignified methods of suicide or divorce I can't see why well-bred people lose their heads and go at it like paid publicity agents."

"You seem quite enthusiastic." His wife's eyes darkened in a way they had when she was irritated. "Is it a model suicide or a model divorce you are contemplating?"

"Nonsense, Cecily!" Griswold said crossly. "Isn't there anything under the canopy a man can discuss without your making a personal matter of it? The temper of red-headed girls! All I meant to say was that if you and I, for instance, should decide upon a divorce, we could go through with it in a thoroughly amiable fashion."

"We aren't always amiable now. Why should our dispositions improve upon the verge of separation?"

"Don't you think a husband and wife might have a certain pride in showing themselves at their best, and not at their worst, at the end of the stretch? After all, few

people can live together for several years and not have some happy memories, some jolly times shared; and it seems to me that whatever they can find that is wholesome and sweet might well be put at the end of their relation—to make a clean wound of the cutting, instead of a festering sore."

"Where would you stage this model operation—Reno?"

"Good Heavens, no! Reno is for poor people who can't afford to take longer than six months to be divorced in, or for those whose speed-limit urges them not to wait longer than six months and half a day before making a change of partners. Above everything, the really dignified divorce must be unhurried."

"Divorce hardly needs your brief in its defense." Cecily's voice had the cool tinkle of ice. "From being looked at askance it wedged its way into social recognition, then into popularity, then into being rather smart, and finally into being accepted as a matter of course."

"Except with certain old-fashioned people, such as your father and my mother," he replied. "Well, what have you on hand for this afternoon?"

"We were to go to the Mitchells' tea-dance." She laid a delicate stress on the pronoun.

"Make my excuses, please—that's a good girl. Toothache, headache, homicidal mania, chronic alcoholism—any excuse but the truth that a tea this afternoon would bore me to death, Cecil dear."

"I can't say that it interests me overwhelmingly." Cecily rose as she spoke. "Especially to go unescorted, as I have done so often of late; but one has to observe certain social amenities, and the Mitchells are members of our set."

"Our set' is such a steadily widening term that we are kept going day and night."

"It was you who urged me to go out

again when my heart was least in it," she returned, leaving the room.

As she dressed, she kept thinking how animated Nick had seemed while they discussed divorce, though of late he had been so uninterested in everything. Her thoughts slipped into somber channels. Certainly life together had been a far cry from the protracted lark they had planned it to be in the happy days of their engagement.

The first year had been wonderful, even to its occasional lovers' quarrels, and the memory of it lay in her heart like a warm glow. The next year brought the great sorrow of her life. A motor accident caused the premature birth of her little son. He lived but four months—long enough for the tiny down on his head to take on the reddish hue of her own, long enough for her heart to be held in the frail hands which were hers in miniature. To give him up tore at the roots of her life, especially because of the doctor's verdict that there could never be another child.

At the time Nick seemed to feel the baby's death much less than she did, because of his greater anxiety over her desperate illness and her slow return to health; but three years had passed since then, and perhaps in the secret recesses of his soul he found it as hard to relinquish fatherhood as she did to give up motherhood.

The conversation rankled in her mind. Afterward it seemed to her that it was the trivial beginning which laid the first foundation-stone in the Griswold divorce-case. Things appeared to slip imperceptibly to that point. A queer listlessness about Nick, a strange indifference to his work as consulting engineer, a growing indifference in his personal relations, chilled and bewildered her. He no longer caught her to him and kissed her a dozen times in the old way, even after their quarrels. For weeks he had not once come into her room to say good night; but more profound than any lack of demonstration was a growing sense of spiritual detachment, a feeling of being outside Nick's life. And how gallantly and gladly their journey together had begun!

"Nick is a gentleman. If he had stopped caring for me, this is exactly the way he would act," she thought bitterly.

At times she felt as if she hated him for the power he still had to hurt her, though she was not sure whether it was her love or her pride which suffered. Then came a sudden impulse to put him to the test.

"Suppose we get that model divorce, Nick?" she suggested. "I don't think we are making a conspicuous success of it together. When we married, we believed that we should add to the harmony and happiness of each other's life, and when we cease doing that it is sufficient 'grounds' for us to say good-by."

There was absolutely no mistaking the flash of relief which swept over Griswold's face. He stumbled in his words as he accepted her decision with some incoherent phrases about the fault being his. But that look had betrayed him. It was relief, a curious exaltation.

To the very depths of her soul Cecily Griswold felt cold and sick. What a sorry failure her wifedom must have been when after five years a man was glad to let her go!

"I'll leave the details of the arrangements to you." She kept her voice as casual as if she were ordering dinner. "Our incomes are about the same, so you will please let that part of it alone."

"As you like; but I shall claim the privilege of leaving you everything I have."

She understood that as a way of telling her that there would be no successor. Many men had made the same promise to dearly loved wives and had broken it; she smiled mirthlessly to think how small was the chance of faithfulness to a divorced wife.

"And no publicity," she said abruptly. "No head-lines, no reporters, no gossip; above all, no advice from your family or mine."

"Then we'll have to keep it a secret until the divorce is about to be granted," he reflected.

"I thought you had already mapped out a model working plan?"

"In a way, I have. It takes a year's residence in New Mexico, and then divorce is about as easy to obtain as it is in Nevada. Suppose we give it out to our friends generally that I am going out to New Mexico to investigate some mining prospects, then dope it to them that I am keen about the country and that you are going to join me out there?"

"They would be stupid to believe it when I kept postponing my departure."

"Then come," he said eagerly. "See here, Cecil, we are friends always. Let's take the last turn of the road together like good pals. I've been like a sore-headed bear lately, I know, and I don't want this



"SKELETONS? NOTHING SO DECENT—PUTRID CORPSES!"

to be your last memory of me. What is there to hinder your coming out there and staying a few months? It will rest you from the hectic life you lead here, and I think we can have a jolly good time of it and throw our two families off the track. At the end of the year, all you have to do is to take the train to El Paso, or anywhere you please, and write me a letter stating that you've left me for good and forever and will never under any circumstances consent to live with me again. Then I can get an immediate divorce on the ground of abandonment. I may not have made a con-

spicuous success as a husband, Cecil, but I am the best friend you have, and you can trust me not to do anything to make your stay in New Mexico otherwise than you would wish it to be. I've never known people to get a friendly divorce, but we'll show it can be done. We'll have a good time right up to the last, and teach the world a new trick. Of course, a lifetime isn't long enough for me to be sorry in about the motor accident—"

She put out a protesting hand to ward off the words.

"You couldn't help it, Nick. It was the

drunken driver of the other car. Please don't go back to it again! You know I've never blamed you for it half an instant, but—but I can't talk about it. Let's talk about our—our divorce instead. Are you really in earnest about New Mexico?"

II

Six months later Cecily was on her way to join her husband. She did not know whether his letters—frequent, brief, enthusiastic—mirrored his real liking for his new surroundings, or were merely intended to quote to their respective families. She was reluctant to come, but determined that she would play the rôle blithely assigned to her and "be a good sport."

Griswold met her at the station, his face aglow with pleasure and welcome. For a moment memories of like meetings swept poignantly over them both; but the man recovered himself first.

"It's corking of you to come, Cecil," he said, as he helped her into his car. "I'm afraid the trip has tired you. You're prettier than ever, but aren't you thinner?"

"It's you who are fatter," she retorted. "And sunburnt! Why, Nick, you're burned to a crisp."

"Out here one basks in the sunshine like a lizard. It's the popular outdoor sport for the idle rich."

"So you wrote me," she laughed. "You kept telling me how wonderful the air was until mother said: 'Does Nicholas think you are the Weather Bureau?'"

"There's a lot out here besides climate. We'll motor out to the biggest surface copper-mine in the world, and I'll show you turquoise-mines, zinc-mines, copper, gold, silver, and all the fifty-seven varieties. You'll meet some of the most attractive people you could run across. It's an oddly cosmopolitan place; people from all over the face of the globe come to this spot for health, mining, or divorce. You'll hear all sorts of yarns about the old days when there were only miners and cow-punchers around. The men who made a lucky strike would come to town and gamble until day-break, and at the end of each game some fellow would go to the door of the saloon, toss away a deck of cards, and call for a new one, so that in the early morning the street would be littered with cards as thick as leaves."

"Asphalt isn't half so picturesque as playing-cards for a pavement," she re-

gretted. "I'm sorry we weren't here in the earlier days. What a charming place!"

The car stopped.

"You really like it? Here we are!"

The furnished house which he had rented was Spanish in architecture, set back from the street with an avenue of cottonwood-trees. The front door opened directly upon a patio, open to the sky, and to the right and left of this were the two wings which contained the sleeping-rooms, while the living-room and dining-room were at the rear. The house was really a sort of open square, with windows in every room facing on the patio. The effect had probably been charming when the patio was ablaze with flowers, daily watered and tended; but since the owners had returned to the East only the cacti had survived the struggle for existence in an almost rainless climate. There was a cactus shaped like a small thorny keg, another with curved thorns like fish-hooks; the cholla cactus bristled with distorted branches, the giant cactus towered tall and fleshy, and Aaron's Rod looked as if its dusty ugliness could never break into blossom again.

"How repellent they are, how oddly hostile they look!" Cecily exclaimed. "May I put in flowers?"

He opened a door into the right wing and showed her the pretty suite of rooms which was to be hers. They had just been done over in French chints, and he had sent to El Paso for her favorite roses to fill the vases. They explored the living-room, charmingly simple and spacious; with good rugs and well-chosen pottery; and then he showed her his own room.

"Why, it's like a monk's cell!" she cried in amazement. "I never suspected your ascetic tastes, Nick; have you been reading Tolstoy? You are using your sleeping-porch, aren't you? I thought you disliked to sleep out."

"I'm a convert. It makes one sleep like old *Rip*. I hope you'll try it."

She colored a little uncertainly, and was annoyed that he saw and understood it, for he hastily explained:

"Your room has a sleeping-porch, too."

"Shall I have time to dress before dinner?" she asked. "At what hour do you dine?"

"I gave orders for our dinner to be at seven this evening." He corrected her pronoun. "But I told the servants you would take charge when you came. Probably the

Earles will drop in to-night to welcome you."

Cecily dressed with unusual care. These men and women were to be the immediate witnesses of their star performance. Well, they should wonder when they knew. That tribute was her due.

She put on a black frock, shimmering and diaphanous, which emphasized the whiteness of her throat and neck. Her dark eyes and eyebrows made her masses of red hair the more arresting. Her skin was fine in texture, but delicate in coloring; her eyes and lips and her glorious hair gave the wanted note of color. There was about her the elusive charm of a face which holds a contradiction—defiant, challenging eyes and a mouth that was pensive, wistful, sweet.

A sudden shyness kept her from glancing directly at her husband when she rejoined him. If his old warm look of approval of her beauty swept into his eyes, she did not want to see it; and if it did not, she did not want to look for it in vain.

But there was no doubt as to the admiration of Nick's friends. A dozen or more called that evening, and women as well as men could not keep their eyes away from her radiant loveliness. Vinton, who was the last to leave, caught Griswold by the shoulders and shook him heartily.

"You ought to be strung up for springing Mrs. Griswold on us in this fashion. Now I'm a hardened old bachelor and stiffened against surprises; but when you hadn't thrown out a hint, how could I have guessed that Mrs. Griswold's husband was the luckiest of men? Good night, Mrs. Griswold; when is the first possible moment I may come again?"

"Say eight o'clock breakfast, Cecil, and call his bluff. The lazy old hypocrite has never crawled out of bed before eleven since his mine struck pay-dirt."

"I should gladly have stayed until eight if the invitation had come spontaneously from Mrs. Griswold," said Vinton, bowing good night.

"Do you like them, Cecil?" Nick asked eagerly. "I don't want you to be bored here. They fell for you—the entire bunch! You were your nicest self to them—and that's hard to beat, you know."

"Tell me more about them all, Nick." Cecily's face was animated with interest. "The breezy friend who has just gone, for instance?"

"Black sheep of prominent Eastern family; expelled from college for some fool scrape; father grew tired of paying his debts after considerable experience in doing it; shipped him West. He drifted here, got interested in Zamora Copper, and wrote his father that if he would give him five thousand dollars he would sign a paper promising never to ask for or accept another cent from him. The old man took him up, sent the money; he invested every penny of it in Zamora at two dollars and forty cents a share and sold it at fifty-seven dollars. The interesting part is that although he was a spendthrift with his father's money he's distinctly careful with his own, and now the black sheep is the family's blue-ribbon exhibit."

"Now tell me about Mrs. Welles—the little woman with the Southern voice and the becoming hat. I liked her best of all."

"She's true grit and pure gold, if that does sound paradoxical. Bert Welles is a lawyer who developed tuberculosis; tried to fight it out back home, but the bug beat in every round, in a way it has of doing. Then his wife took charge. They must sell their home and go West; she would live in the Pecos Valley, on a ranch twenty miles from a neighbor; she'd camp in the mountains, she'd bring the children or leave them with her mother—nothing was material in comparison with Bert's getting well. They came out here—Bert flat on his back and carried from the train on a stretcher. Bert insists that all the best people arrive here that way. That was seven years ago, and now he's practising law and enjoying life as only a man can who has looked at death at close quarters without being in the least afraid of it. Did I tell you that he was my lawyer?"

At the word, silence cut between them like a chilling wind. Nick spoke first, his voice harsh and strained:

"These few months you are here, suppose we don't mention the divorce at all, Cecil? Understand, I am not remotely suggesting that you should change your mind about it. I agree absolutely in the wisdom of it; but shall we let that sleeping dog lie for the last brief time we are together?"

"As you like," she agreed carelessly. "Good night, Nick."

She rose. The charm which had held them was broken like a spell. Fatigue seemed to veil her beauty, always more or less dependent upon her mood.

"I have kept you up inhospitably late," he said, holding open the door for her to pass. "Good night, Cecily."

He barely touched her hand with his lips.

III

THE next few weeks proved that there was no doubt as to the place Cecily had made with Griswold's friends.

"Hit? Why, you've bowled 'em over!" Nick exulted. "My compliments on your adaptability! At home you fit into the surroundings like an orchid in a conservatory, and here you bloom like the yucca, which is the desert's prettiest daughter."

Cecily had just come in from a ride with Vinton to the Earles' ranch. She had forgotten her vexation at Nick's laziness in

not accompanying them. She swept a curtsy in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Everybody wouldn't agree with you," she demurred. "Dr. MacDowell, for instance. He dislikes me cordially, and pierces me with his 'thou-art-weighed-in-the-balance-and-found-wanting' glance!"

"Surly old Scot!" Nick said affectionately. "I must admit that he has been impervious this far, but he'll probably fall all the harder when he succumbs. I've been out to the 'san' all morning, and MacDowell is tremendously pleased at the way Jimmy is improving. I have permission to bring you out to see him to-morrow."

Between Dr. MacDowell and Griswold had sprung up one of the silent, profound friendships of men. There was rarely a



THE ARDENT EYES AND THE WHITE FACE WON HER

morning that Nick did not spend at the sanatorium, as he said that a talk and a smoke and the doctor's laboratory made the most satisfactory combination he could find. Nick talked a great deal of Jimmy Ames, a little fellow who had developed tuberculosis, and whose sister had scraped together the money to bring him out West to the eminent doctor. Cecily smiled to herself when Nick told her the story, because it was plain to her that he himself was "staking" Jimmy and giving the boy his one chance for health.

Nick and Cecily motored over to the sanatorium the next morning. The groups of white cottages looked bright and friendly in the sunshine, and the doctor pointed out the cottage in which she would find Jimmy. He added the suggestion that Griswold should remain with him, as he did not wish Jimmy to have more than one visitor.

The girl who opened the door fairly dumfounded Mrs. Griswold. Her eyes were big and blue and confiding, her skin the softest pink and white, and her aureole of pale, golden curls made her look like a child saint. In her white frock and blue ribbons she looked about sixteen, though Griswold had said that she was two years older. At the sight of her visitor the color rippled over her face, and she cried:

"Oh, you're *his* wife, aren't you?"

"I am Mrs. Griswold."

"Jimmy has longed to see you. Honey, here's Mr. Nick's wife!"

Jimmy was lying on his cot. His hair was dark, but his eyes were bluer than his sister's, and his thin little face had a lovely look of eagerness.

"Won't you please, please, *please*, take all the hairpins out of your hair?" he demanded. "Mr. Nick said that *Lettice Let-Down-Your-Hair* in the fairy story hasn't nearly as pretty hair as you!"

The ardent eyes and the white face won her. As Cecily took down the glittering wealth of hair, she thought of Nick's pride in the reddish down on their baby's head.

"Mr. Nick don't know any fairy stories, and I've heard Emmy's and the doctor's, but you know nice new ones!"

He stated it coaxingly and nestled down into his pillows.

Griswold came for her half an hour later. He stood at the door watching her—the sun on the bright, loosened hair, and Jimmy's hand holding to her skirt lest she might slip away from him.

Emmy ran toward him joyfully.

"Can't you come in? Then I'll come out. I was so sorry not to have seen you when you came yesterday that I was cross all the rest of the day!"

When Cecily finished the story and came outside, Emmy stopped short in what she was saying and colored vividly. To make it worse, she rushed into explanations:

"I was afraid you might have heard what I was saying, Mrs. Griswold, and it would have sounded silly to you. Mr. Nick is so good about letting me tell him everything about my unimportant little self. You'll come soon again, won't you?" She turned to Griswold and added, without any question as to his return: "When you come over to-morrow, please don't forget to bring the magazines you promised."

On the way home Griswold asked a dozen questions about Jimmy, but Cecily could not put the questions she would have liked to ask—why he had said so little of Emily Ames, whom he evidently saw daily on his visits to the sanatorium, and why he had failed to mention that she was as exquisite as an ungathered white rosebud. Cecily faced the issue squarely in her characteristic way of being honest with herself.

"I voluntarily gave up Nick when I decided upon a divorce. I have forfeited the right to object if he is falling in love with this girl. One thing I know absolutely, and that is that Nick would never do anything to hurt a child like that. He wouldn't make love to her while he is still ostensibly a married man, though it's perfectly evident that she's in love with him."

What a relentless power there was in youth! That pretty child could give Nick about as much real companionship as a Christmas doll. But the next four months were still hers, and she would give Nick her mind, her sympathy, her companionship, in the way she knew. He might marry Emmy then, but *he would remember her.*

IV

EVEN to herself Cecily could not have defined her state of mind in the weeks and months that followed. She knew that Nick saw Emily Ames daily; she knew that he paid her expenses at the sanatorium, for when she had suggested taking care of Jimmy he had rather shamefacedly admitted that he sent Emmy a check every month to cover all their expenses. Rather than seem to be spying on her husband, a rôle she would



"GOOD-BY, MY WIFE!"

have scorned beyond expression, Cecily made her visits to Jimmy in the afternoons.

In spite of the fact that Mr. Nick had befriended him for months, the boy soon gave the first place in his affections to Cecily. It was as if he divined the unsatisfied mother-hunger in her nature. He was gaining steadily. His cheeks were tinged with the flush of returning health, and his tongue wagged happily all the day long.

There was an evening when, as Nick said good night at the door of her room,

the look of struggle in his eyes swept Cecily with a swift response. She had only to open her door to him, and the victory would be hers. She could make him forget any passing fancy for that pretty doll caused by his loneliness before she came. Her voice was very soft as she murmured the foolish nickname of their early married life:

"St. Nicholas!"

She felt him tremble as he held her hand against his cheek, and with an effort which seemed to wrench her she recovered herself.

"Good night—happy dreams!" she ended quickly, and went into her room, closing the door.

She lay awake, restless and unhappy, listening to him walking up and down in the patio. The place was a blaze of flowers now; soon the frost would have them, but she, too, would be gone. Nick had wanted the divorce; he would have Emmy to console him. She must have Jimmy!

The thought of returning East and taking up the old life without Nick repelled her; but after she went away and wrote the letter which would enable him to get the divorce and to leave New Mexico forever, she would return and make a home for Jimmy. Emmy was fretting to go back to the East, and impatient over Dr. MacDowell's decision that the boy must remain at least six months longer. Cecily would stay with him; she could not lose out of her life the eager welcome in his eyes and the ripple of content in his voice when he greeted her.

No doubt Nick would help her to have her way about Jimmy. Even married to another woman, it was impossible to conceive of him as not helping her to have her wish about anything. And she deserved something from him, for she had been a "good sport" through this idiotic plan of his. They were having things decent and wholesome at the end—no recriminations, no advice, no publicity—altogether a model divorce.

Her tearless eyes stared into the darkness, her ears strained to listen to that steady tramping outside. In a few days even that pseudo-nearness would be over, for the year of residence would be ended on Thursday, and she would be free to go.

It was hard for both of them that the day before she left happened to be her birthday. Tacitly they accepted that the day was to pass as normally as possible. In the morning they went to see Jimmy, who was ecstatic over the birthday-cake frosted with pink roses and shining with tiny candles. In the afternoon they motored over the wonderful ridge which Cecily had christened the Top of the World Road.

On that last day with the husband of her first youth, it seemed to Cecily as if something in her soul was reborn. The challenge of the high peaks, the graciousness of space, the peace of the far horizon, quieted her heart.

"At first I missed the intimate loveliness of the green hills at home, Nick," she said

when the silence became too full of speech to bear; "but I have learned to love the beauty of line and color of the mountains here, and to watch for the brief moment when they are suddenly irradiated just before sunset. Nothing has ever satisfied my worship of color and light as this country does. You know how cross I always was on gray, rainy days at home?"

He nodded, smiling at her with a perceptible effort. He had not spoken, and she, too, took refuge in silence. The sun dropped behind the hills, the afterglow faded slowly, and when they reached their home again the dusk was chilling and the few stars seemed cold and far.

Cecily was glad that they were to dine with Vinton at the Country Club, for the day *à deux* had been an ordeal which she had not the strength to prolong. When the evening was over she could not remember a word that had been said, but she had an incoherent impression that she had been her gayest self, more daring than was her wont, and that every one had laughed over her sallies—except, of course, Dr. MacDowell, whose somber eyes were fixed on her with a look half questioning, half contemptuous.

Friends swarmed at the house the next morning, and others went to the station to say good-by and to urge her to hurry back from her trip East. Nick and herself did not have a moment alone except when he went into the Pullman with her.

"Good-by, my wife!"

The words were strangled as he held her to him a moment and kissed her brow and the bright hair that he had adored when their love was young.

V

CECILY stared out of the window as the train sped on. Mesquite, sage-brush, greasewood, yucca—they had for her the friendliness of familiar things, they seemed dearer than her rose-garden at home.

She and Nick had made the garden together. The stone flags with strips of grass between and the trellises of pink pillar roses had been his suggestions; the sheet of pansies which covered the ground under the Killarney roses had been her idea. The result was rather disappointing; but how furious Nick would get with any one who failed to praise her pansy-bed!

When she thought of the enthusiastic, quick-tempered, demonstrative boy Nick

had been in those days, it seemed as if his very nature had changed. Yet there was still the same characteristic of thoughtfulness for her. For instance, he had been months in securing just the silver fox furs he wanted for her birthday. An exclamation of distress escaped her as she realized that she had forgotten them. She had meant to wear them away, but in the confusion of many farewells she had forgotten to put them on. Nick would think she had purposely discarded his last gift.

As soon as the train reached Deming, where she had an hour's wait, she hurried into a telephone-booth. Her butler answered the call, and said that Mr. Griswold had gone out to the sanatorium as soon as Mrs. Griswold left, and had not yet returned. So quickly to seek the cooing consolations of Emily Ames!

Cecily's lips were compressed into a bitter line as she hung up the receiver. She struggled to a decision, and though her better self gained the victory her whole being was quivering with pain. As she had played the game straight, she would play it to the end. Nick might at this moment be enjoying the limpid adoration of Emmy's blue eyes, but that was no reason why she should fail in courtesy or appreciation of his gift. She would make the explanation about the furs and ask him to forward them to her, as she had intended.

Calling up the sanatorium, she asked for Mr. Griswold.

"He's in bed," replied an unknown voice, "and Dr. MacDowell don't like the patients to be disturbed after bedtime."

"But Mr. Griswold is not a patient," she contradicted impatiently.

"Yes, he's here again," insisted the dogged voice. "He's back in the same cotage he had before."

"Before!" The walls of the booth were spinning around queerly, but she managed to ask: "Has Mr. Griswold been a patient before now?"

"He was here for six months, and now he's come back. Do you want to speak to the doctor?"

But the receiver had dropped from her hand. She reeled blindly out of the booth. The chilling night air revived her, and she steadied herself to think coherently.

Everything was suddenly clear. A blinding flash of truth had lighted every dark corner, every puzzling mystery of Nick's life and hers. Her knowledge of her hus-

band—the husband whom she could at last acknowledge that she loved with every pulse of her life—made her understand.

The nervous irritability, so foreign to his temperament, which had been the first cloud to come between Nick and herself, only stirred her tenderness now that she saw it as a symptom of disease. Then, when he found that he had tuberculosis, he had made that quixotic, idiotic, characteristic decision to give her back her freedom. Nick felt that she had lost motherhood through that unhappy accident for which he blamed himself, and that he would not tie her down to a consumptive husband and possible exile from all her friends and associations. So he had conceived this plan and kept the truth from her.

His very secrecy about it had proved his faith in her, for he knew she would never desert an invalid husband. Her boy! Her foolish, proud, dear old Nick!

The trunks were checked to El Paso, but life was too short to delay over such trivial things as three trunks filled with delightful clothes. She found an official who directed her to a garage, and in a short time she had started on the long ride back.

VI

It was nearly midnight when she reached the sanatorium and was shown into Dr. MacDowell's study. The relief of finding him still awake was so great that her knees gave way, and she staggered into a seat. Her hair was disheveled, her coat gray with dust, but the doctor looked at her with an approval he had never shown before.

"I—I didn't know—I never dreamed—" she stammered brokenly.

"That idiot told me what he said to you at the telephone. Griswold had insisted that you must not know—that you did not guess. I thought he was wrong, and that a woman of your intelligence must suspect the truth. I've been pretty hard on you in my thoughts. Am I forgiven?"

He held out a hand, and hers met it in a trembling clasp.

"Together, then, the rest of the way? Pulling together, we'll get Griswold *cured*. You want to see him to-night, of course?"

"May I?" Her voice was quivering and eager.

"Yes, child. I'm just from his room, and he's restless and sleepless. You'll help him as nothing else can, but you must not go in with that tragic face."

In the next quarter of an hour Cecily learned why Dr. MacDowell's patients idolized him. He had something hot and appetizing brought for her to drink, he heaped up wood on the fire that she might feel the cheer of the open blaze; and when warmth and food and kindness had brought the color back to her face, he frankly told her the story of her husband's case.

He had been more than satisfied at the way Griswold responded to treatment, but at the end of six months, against the doctor's advice, the patient had rented a house and written for his wife to join him. He came out to the sanatorium daily, and rested on a cot all morning; but while he had not lost ground, his improvement had been so slow that the doctor had insisted upon his return. He could probably live anywhere he chose later, as he would be a cured man, but MacDowell earnestly advised that he should remain in that dry climate.

"He has been a monomaniac on the subject of your not finding out. He pretended to his friends here that he was sensitive about it, and asked them never to allude to his condition to you or to him. It couldn't have happened anywhere else, but here there's a peculiar feeling of good fellowship—the fraternity of the bug, somebody called it—and a sick man's whim is respected. He has confided in nobody besides myself your and his rather—er—unusual procedure for divorce; and I'm the only confidant of his plan for keeping Jimmy here and adopting the boy. The sister has about consented. He's fine stuff, that youngster! If you want to do something for your husband, take that boy into your home, and for patience's sake let that girl get back East to her fiancé! Griswold, with his habit of helping other people, has succeeded in getting the young man a berth in a bank. Now, shall I take you to him?"

"Still awake, Griswold?" asked the doctor, when they reached his cottage. "Here's an independent prescription that insists it belongs to you!"

MacDowell walked rapidly away. Cecily came forward in the moonlight and knelt by her husband's bed, her arms around him, her face against his.

"Cecil! My wife, my darling, are you real? Are you *here*?"

"I motored back from Deming. I'll explain everything to-morrow, but to-night I can't tell you anything except that I love

you—that I have always loved you," she cried in a sobbing breath. "It's the only really important thing, the only thing which matters in our lives. Oh, Nick, why didn't you tell me? My heart was dead because I thought you had stopped caring for me."

"It would be easier to stop caring for sun and air. You are life itself to me, Cecil. But, dearest, how can I let you tie your youth to a broken man?"

"We're going to mend you, the doctor and I—to be able to spoil you and fuss over you again in the dear old way! I want to wait on you and be ordered around and even scolded a very little!"

"I can't do that part of it. I'll never be cross to you again as long as I live."

It seemed an auspicious time for her confession.

"Nick, please don't be vexed with me"—her voice was meek and small—"but I thought you were falling in love with Emmy, and were going to marry her. I never dreamed I could be so horribly, humiliatingly jealous of anybody as I have been of Emmy Ames!"

"*What?*" he fairly shouted in his astonished indignation. "You thought I was in love with that pink paper doll? After our wonderful years together, after living with a woman with mind and heart and soul, you thought I'd fall for the first baby-faced girl who happened along? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Cecil!"

His good resolutions forgotten, he caught her by the shoulder and actually shook her in his wrath.

"It's better than our deadly civility and detachment of the last six months. I never was so happy in my life as I am this minute!" she murmured, laughing. "But don't think there's a single pang of jealousy left for you to shake out. You know I've never been suspicious or jealous before, Nick; but I was wandering in an unknown world when I thought you had ceased to love me, and so I lost my bearings."

His arm slipped around her and he drew her close.

"My blessed wife, my *wife!* It's such a marvelous word that I want to say it over and over. Facing separation made us realize how beautiful marriage can be. This is the day on which I was to take the first steps in that model divorce of ours—and the beginning day finds you close against my heart!" Nick's face was as contented as a child's. "Two o'clock and all's well!"